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12/17/1980 - Football Panthers

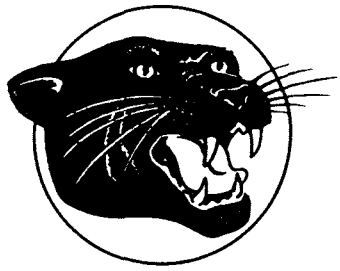
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Panther Sports News

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, Charleston, IL 61920

DAVID KIDWELL, Sports Information Director

OFFICE: (217) 581-2920

HOME: (217) 345-4166

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--Eastern Illinois University's come-from-behind football Panthers concluded its final season in NCAA II finishing second in the national championship.

The Panthers, who came from behind successfully eight times during the season, finished 11-3, the second most wins in school history. They lost the championship game to Cal Poly/SLO, 21-13.

It was the first time in 40 years the Panthers put together three straight winning seasons. EIU was 30-9 during this period with the 12-2 National Championship in 1978. Eastern will be classified I-AA next season.

The Panthers set or tied 14 individual and team records and earned a number of individual awards.

Wide receiver Scott McGhee (Palos Heights-Sandburg) was the most prolific setting season and career records for most TD pass receptions with 16 and 27, respectively.

He also tied Poke Cobb for most touchdowns (16) and points (96) in a single season. He finished No. 2 on the career pass receiving yardage list with 1920, was tied for second in total pass receptions (109) and second in career TDs (27).

QB Jeff Christensen (Gibson City) set game records for most passing yardage (370) and total offense (365) as he led the Panthers to a 35-28 win over Northern Michigan when the Wildcats were ranked No. 1.

Christensen was also cited as EIU's 'Outstanding Player of the Game' by ABC-TV which televised the game regionally.

Christensen also threw for 1340 season yards, fifth best single season total. Chuck Wright's (Canton) 14 TD passes were the third best season mark.

Rich Brown (Akron, OH-Buchtel) set the other individual record by intercepting 17 career passes during his four year career.

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Defensive end Pete Catan (Penfield, NY) concluded a successful year by earning First Team All-American honors from the American Football Coaches Association.

Catan previously was named HM All-American by the Associated Press in 1978 and First Team AP in 1979. He also was chosen by the Mid-Continent Conference as 'Defensive Lineman of the Year'.

Offensive Guard Steve Parker (Evanston-Triton JC) and Rod Slaughter (Detroit, MI-Cass Tech) also received ABC-TV 'Outstanding Player of the Game' awards in the two televised playoff games.

Kevin Gray (Chicago-Hyde Park/Kennedy-King JC) was chosen the Mid-Continent Conference 'Defensive Back of the Year'.

It was a veteran outfit that led the Panthers to the title game. There were nine seniors starting on offense in the championship game.

The only returning starters are junior tight end Rob Mehalic (Streator-Woodland) and freshman running back Kevin Staple (Markham-Thornwood).

Top reserves who started at least one game during the season are offensive linemen George Tuzil (Schaumburg) and Scott Gilleland (Barrington) along with Christensen.

Defensively EIU loses six senior starters. Gray will be the top returning starter at free safety. Wilbert James (Washington, DC-Woodson) returns at cornerback.

The linebackers will be the strongest with juniors Ira Jefferson (Momence) and Tom Murray (Arlington Heights-St. Viator) along with Bill Mines (Washington, DC-Woodson) who played equally with Alonzo Lee in the middle.

Eastern's fabulous 'front four' has been depleted. The lone returnee is sophomore Keith Wojnowski (St. Anne-Kankakee Bishop McNamara).